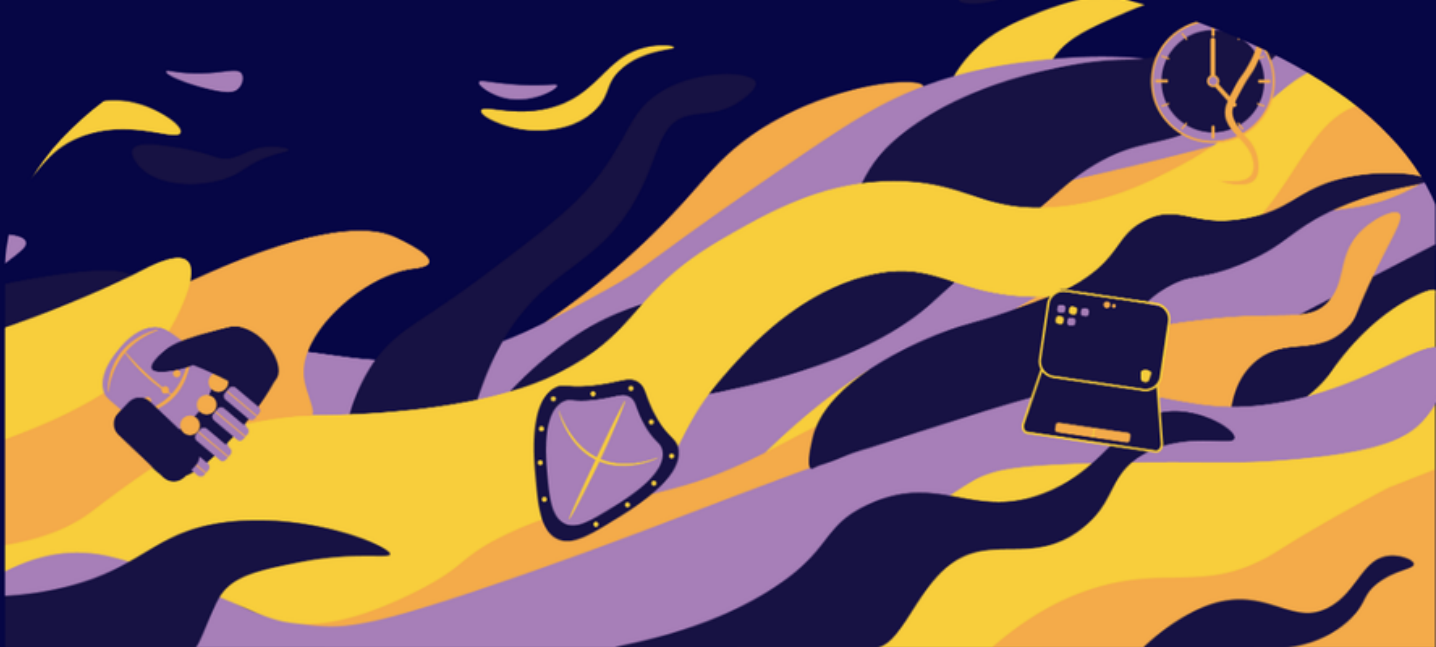




Centre for
Protecting
Women Online

Racially Minoritised Women's Experiences of Tech Abuse Policy Briefing and Research Report

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The content of this report is informed by a Translational Fellowship funded by the Vulnerability and Policing Futures Research, completed by Dr Alishya Dhir in 2025. A condensed version of the findings has been published previously[1], however the following provides a more detailed overview as well as recommendations for policy and practice.

Introduction

We are in a space where tech abuse is constantly evolving. In 2026 we have seen widespread offences facilitated by mainstream AI systems[2], and the proliferation of online forums promoting drug-facilitated rape[3]. Within the mainstream narrative however, Racially Minoritised Women's experiences remain on the margin[4].

Organisations such as Glitch, Amina The Muslim Women's Resource Centre, and Chayn have brought attention to the compounded experiences of Racially Minoritised Women, including widespread misogynoir online[5], and the lived reality of non-explicit forms of image based abuse[6]. However, internalisation of these valuable insights seems to be lacking from research scholarship, alongside criminal justice and broader policy responses.

This project was developed with the intention of addressing these considerable gaps in research and policy. By centring Racially Minoritised Women, their words, experiences and lives, it sought to unpack, in detail, compounded experiences of tech abuse and routes to reporting.

[1] Alishya Dhir, Racially Minoritised Women's Experiences of Technology-Facilitated Sexual Violence and Reporting to the Police (Vulnerability and Policing Futures Research Centre 2026).

[2] Center for Countering Digital Hate, 'Grok floods X with sexualized images of women and children' (22 January 2026) <<https://counterhate.com/research/grok-floods-x-with-sexualized-images/>> accessed 21 July 2026.

[3] Hannah Al-Othman, "'Truly international' network of drug-facilitated rape uncovered by UK crime agency' The Guardian (2 July 2026) <<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2026/jul/02/international-network-drug-facilitated-rape-uncovered-by-uk-crime-agency>> accessed 21 July 2026.

[4] Erika Rackley, Clare McGlynn, Kelly Johnson, Nicola Henry, Nicola Gavey, Asher Flynn and Anastasia Powell, 'Seeking Justice and Redress for Victim-Survivors of Image-Based Sexual Abuse' (2021) 29 Feminist Legal Studies 293.

[5] Glitch, The Digital Misogynoir Report: Ending the Dehumanising of Black Women on Social Media (2023) <<https://www.glitchcharity.co.uk/research>> accessed 10 July 2026.

[6] See Chayn, Explicit Harms of Non-Explicit Images (2026) <<https://reports.chayn.co/>> accessed 16 July 2026; and Amina The Muslim Women's Resource Centre, Exposed campaign <<https://mwrc.org.uk/exposed/>> accessed 16 July 2026.

Key Findings

- Comprehending Tech Abuse
- Image-Based Abuse: Fetishisation, Collector Culture and Niche Sites
- Impersonation Accounts
- Weaponised Shame
- Policing
- Hierarchy of Justice
- Denial of Responsibility by Social Media Platforms

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Recommendations

- Funding Specialist Support Services
- Legal Reform
- Police and Criminal Justice Responses
- Platform Accountability

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Methods

Within the context of this research, the phrase tech abuse was adopted during discussions with practitioners and Racially Minoritised Women. The intention here was to capture wide-ranging forms of harmful behaviour involving technology and digital spaces. Whilst the academic landscape demands precise terminology, there are complexities lost within the confines of definitions such as ‘technology-facilitated sexual violence’, or ‘doxxing’, particularly when many may have been shaped by mainstream, Western, understandings of abuse.

A mixed methods approach was utilised for the project. Five in-depth interviews were carried out with Racially Minoritised Women who had experienced tech abuse. The interviews covered their interests, harmful experiences, and what they would want to see the research achieve. Six front-line practitioners were interviewed to gather their expertise on responding to tech and abuse and supporting those who had experienced it. Lastly, five vignette case studies were analysed, alongside a small qualitative survey, aimed at Racially Minoritised Women, of twelve responses. Quotes included in this report are taken from interviews with practitioners working at different specialist support services.

Five Unique Stories

It is essential to acknowledge the invaluable contribution of women who gave their time to this project. It is a reflection of their experiences and lives. None of this would have been possible without them.

As opposed to dissecting the conversations I had with Racially Minoritised Women who experienced tech abuse, I decided to keep their accounts as whole stories. Below are brief overviews of each conversation and each woman's story.

Sofía is Hispanic. She likes reading and listening to music. Sofía discussed her experience of encountering harmful stereotypes and presumptions about her character based on her name.

Livia is Japanese and South American. She likes being close to nature. Livia spoke about her differing experiences depending on the international context, and fetishised content creating an unwelcome experience online.

Naaz is Asian Pakistani. She likes collecting antique books. Naaz experienced tech abuse as part of a broader pattern of abuse. She described the journey to receive justice through the criminal justice system.

Deepti is British Indian. She is passionate about victim advocacy, particularly within minoritised communities. We spoke about experiences she had across her life and how shame was weaponised against her.

Maya is mixed Black Caribbean and White. She enjoys online gaming and content creation. Maya has engaged with safety work for much of her life, crafting a safe space for herself where the online environment is enjoyable.

Key Findings

Comprehending Tech Abuse

Tech abuse does not exist, nor operate within refined and singular categories, there are experiences within and across multiple forms of harm. Whilst researchers have articulated the overlapping nature through a continuum framing[7], it is important to distinguish how this is experienced from a racialised perspective, and how some forms of harms are not as visible or well understood.

During in-depth interviews with Racially Minoritised Women, concerns were raised about the discomfort women felt using social media platforms where fetishised content was promoted and commented on. Here racist and misogynistic content actively created an unwelcoming space for Racially Minoritised Women. Indeed it is difficult to place this harm amongst existing definitions and understandings, yet this does not denounce the impact. Whilst a continuum approach acknowledges the in-between, compounded experiences remain obfuscated in attempts to identify tech abuse.

[7] Clare McGlynn, Erika Rackley and Ruth Houghton, 'Beyond "Revenge Porn": The Continuum of Image-Based Sexual Abuse' (2017) 25 Feminist Legal Studies 25.



Image-Based Abuse: Fetishisation, Collector Culture and Niche Sites

The fetishisation of Racially Minoritised Women is sadly not a new phenomenon, however, technology has created new ground for fetishisation to flourish, which was overtly evident in cases of image-based abuse.

"I would say that the content [non-consensual material] tends to be spread quite quickly when it's anybody of a racial minority group, whether it's a Black woman or an Asian woman, the content just seems to spread more quickly and seems to spread further. I guess it's fetishised. The terminology the content is shared under is often derogatory, it can be shared alongside racial slurs. It's often like a collectable, which is such as disgusting term, but there are often these collector culture sites where people are trying to collect content of a specific group of people."

Non-consensual material of Racially Minoritised Women is being hosted on 'collector sites' where it is commonly fetishised, shared extensively, and is accompanied by racist and sexist language. The comment above clearly evidences how race transforms the nature of image-based abuse. Here gendered abuse is gendered, and racist, non-consensual image-sharing is a violation of a woman's autonomy, and it reduces racialised women to degrading, harmful stereotypes.

"The comments underneath the posts are just really disgusting. It adds to it massively, not only has your picture being shared, but there are forty random men writing absolutely disgusting derogatory things under the post as well. It makes me so angry."

Image-based abuse offences are multi-faceted with women likely to experience multiple forms, overlapping with broader abuse[8]. The latter commentary details the layered, racialised nature, with the colonial history of fetishisation[9] informing much of the harassment and abuse that occurs alongside the sharing of non-consensual material.

[8] Nicola Henry, Clare McGlynn, Asher Flynn, Kelly Johnson, Anastasia Powell and Adrian J. Scott, *Image-based Sexual Abuse: A Study on the Causes and Consequences of Non-Consensual Nude or Sexual Imagery* (Routledge 2021).

[9] See Caren M Holmes, 'The Colonial Roots of the Racial Fetishization of Black Women' (2016) 2(2) *Black & Gold*; and Sunny Woan, 'White Sexual Imperialism: A Theory of Asian Feminist Jurisprudence' (2008) 13 *Washington and Lee Journal of Civil Rights and Social Justice* 275.



Impersonation Accounts

Practitioners regularly mentioned the use of impersonation accounts to abuse and harm Racially Minoritised Women.

“We often get these cases...it might be a woman and she’s recently broken up with her partner and then he, or someone else in his family, or within the family dynamic, [are] creating continuous impersonation accounts shared under her name. They often have derogatory posts, often posted in another language, or in their first language.”

Perpetrators, and in some cases multiple perpetrators, use these methods to dehumanise, control and destroy the character of women.

“I’ve had a few cases on [support service] where it’s gone on for months, or even years, where they’re constantly having to come in and say another account has been made...They’re spending a large chunk of their lives having to deal with everything themselves and constantly having to look at this stuff and send it to us.”

As the practitioner mentions, the use of impersonation accounts enables abuse to be extended over a considerable duration of time. Additionally, women are often dedicating a substantial amount of time and energy arguably policing and responding to their own abuse.

The extent, nature and impact of impersonation accounts has not been adequately acknowledged in mainstream reporting of tech abuse.



Weaponised Shame

Across conversations with Racially Minoritised Women, practitioners, and analysis of case studies, there were multiple instances where shame had been weaponised by perpetrators.

In cases of image-based abuse, there were examples of perpetrators specifically threatening to, or non-consensually sharing material with women's family and extended community wholly because they knew or suspected an increased risk, arguably of so-called honour-based abuse.

More broadly across the tech abuse landscape, the weaponisation of shame was present in threats to 'out' women or reveal intimate relationships. This was evidenced through the disclosure of private information on impersonation accounts, both about sexuality and personal relationships.

It is important to clarify that while this research solely concerned Racially Minoritised Women, the weaponisation of shame is not confined to racialised communities. Rather there is the potential for this to be prevalent across any communities where there are strongly held traditional, typically gendered, beliefs.



Policing

It is worth initially clarifying that many Racially Minoritised Women who experience tech abuse are very fearful or distrustful of reporting to the police^[10], so whilst this section concerns police responses, there are likely a considerable number of women who do not formally report.

"I think there's so much fear of people reporting to the police because they need it to be confidential [from] their families, and that's a massive barrier for people."

Women interviewed as part of this project described both positive and negative experiences with the police. In some instances, reports of tech abuse were responded to by police with respect and care, with officers being mindful of harm caused. In other instances, tech abuse was disregarded, particularly where there was a broader pattern of abuse, here police would prioritise responding to, and reporting, physical abuse instead.

The lack of cultural awareness amongst police officers was regularly cited across interviews. Practitioners were especially concerned about the impact this had on women reporting.

"It would be good if there were more of an understanding of the different cultural impacts. Even if intimate image abuse law hasn't been broken, for there to be an understanding of why the report is being made and that person might be in quite significant danger or risk of offline abuse as a result of what's happened."

Many Racially Minoritised Women experience multiple barriers to formally reporting abuse to the police. For those that do report tech abuse, having to explain their experience will further deter them from seeking support through these means.

[10] See Fawcett Society, 'Misogyny and Racism Still Endemic in the Met Police' (Fawcett Society, 2026) <[Misogyny and Racism Still Endemic in the Met Police | Fawcett Society](#)> accessed 22 July 2026; Victim Support, 'New Research Shows Police Failing to Act on Domestic Abuse Reports: Ethnic Minority Victims Worst Affected' (Victim Support, 2025) <[New research shows police failing to act on domestic abuse reports – ethnic minority victims worst affected – Victim Support](#)> accessed 22 July 2026.



Policing...

"If you looked at an image of someone holding hands, you would think what are you talking about? It's just a picture of people holding hands. But, if police officers had that understanding that actually there is some added context here, and that is harmful to someone, [the victim/survivor] might be able to seek justice."

The need for police officers to hold a multi-faceted and culturally informed understanding of harm is highly relevant in instances of tech abuse, as described by practitioners, however there are also broader implications across violence against women offences. Racially Minoritised Women should feel assured that if they so choose to formally report abuse, they are met with validation, rather than scepticism.



Hierarchy of Justice

"The definition of an intimate image or video is that it has to be nude, semi-nude, or showing a sexual act. There are women that [will] come to us and [say] 'there's a picture online that shows me without my hijab on' or 'me holding hands with a male' or potentially a kiss or something like that, which obviously to them is classed as intimate. We're very aware that the definition of intimate differs from person to person, but by law, it wouldn't class as intimate. It's difficult to have to say that you know [the] images would be deemed intimate to themselves and we completely understand the harm of that content being out there is just as distressing as someone's sexual image out there."

The definition of intimacy in England and Wales actively restricts Racially Minoritised Women from accessing justice through the criminal justice system following experiences of image-based abuse^[11]. Intimacy, under section 66D (5) of the Sexual Offences Act (2003), is defined as:

- (a) the person participating or engaging in an act which a reasonable person would consider to be a sexual act,
- (b) the person doing a thing which a reasonable person would consider to be sexual,
- (c) all or part of the person's exposed genitals, buttocks or breasts,
- (d) the person in an act of urination or defecation, or
- (e) the person carrying out an act of personal care associated with the person's urination, defecation or genital or anal discharge.

This definition wholly concerns nudity and sexual acts. It is arguably reductive and not at all reflective of the lived experience of Racially Minoritised Women^[12].

Practitioners described their drive to provide victim-survivors with validation of their experiences, especially in the face of a justice system which has failed to recognise their harm.

^[11] See Chayn and Amina The Muslim Women's Resource Centre (n 6).

^[12] See Rackley et al. (n 4).



Hierarchy of Justice...

"The main thing we try and do is to reassure them that we do completely understand how what has happened for them classes [as] intimate abuse and we don't want to take away from that."

At times harassment offences are used in place as they can capture a wider range of harmful behaviours, however, this is not necessarily an adequate solution.

"Harassment is so broad, and I feel it's just a bit of a brush term, [in that] 'oh yeah we'll just class this as harassment', when it's so much deeper than that. Not that harassment isn't harmful, but there's so much more going on than that person being harassed, and it just doesn't cover it."

What forms here is a hierarchy of justice. Racially Minoritised Women who experience image-based abuse are prevented from accessing justice through designated offences. Harassment offences may be offered as an alternative, though they do not accurately symbolise the extent of harm caused. These findings point to yet another barrier in the path of Racially Minoritised Women accessing justice.



Denial of Responsibility by Social Media Platforms

Narrow definitions of harm and abuse were also present across social media platforms. Indeed, it can be argued that this is somewhat facilitated by legal definitions.

"An image of someone without their hijab shared on a social media platform. You report that content directly to the platform itself and they come back and say it's not harmful."

"The websites [are] really reluctant to remove the content because it's not showing genitals or breasts or a sexual act...That's obviously very challenging for people, and it carries the same harm as a nude picture being shared."

The lack of adequate content removal on the side of the platforms mirrors the absence of a policing and legal response which is considerate of compounded experiences. These issues extended to text-based posts on social media platforms.

"I don't know how the Instagram in app reporting system works, but I assume that it's usually getting moderated by English speakers who then can't see what the post is saying...there might be a post that's saying some really derogatory stuff in Arabic for instance."

These comments raise multiple concerns. Initially, social media platforms are contributing to an ever-expanding landscape where Racially Minoritised Women are prevented from accessing help-seeking avenues (including content removal and criminal justice routes), with many support services carrying out additional work to compensate. Secondly, it is likely that harmful content identifiers are (similar to legislation) crafted around Western understandings. Racially Minoritised Women's access to both self-reporting and formal reporting avenues should not be dependent on their experience fitting within these narrow confines. Systems and processes need to be re-defined for all, not some.



Recommendations

Funding Specialist Support Services

Specialist support services, particularly by and for organisations, must receive appropriate funding to be able to run their services, with longer term funding rounds that are not overburdensome being the norm[13]. There needs to be certainty in funding for by and for services[14], to ensure spaces of support exist for Racially Minoritised Women whether they choose to report their experiences to the police or not.

It's also vital to account for the work that support services are carrying out where there is a gap in public services. Whether that be due to capacity, resourcing or knowledge, this work should be accounted for in remuneration.

Support services should not be expected to be experts on how to navigate rapidly evolving technologies. They must also be supported to build capacity in their organisations, or through partnerships with experts, on how to support women experiencing tech abuse.

[13] House of Commons Home Affairs Committee, Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls: Funding (Third Report of Session 2024-25, HC 741, 2025) <<https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/48755/documents/255530/default/>> accessed 22 July 2026.

[14] Ibid.

Legal Reform

Compounded experiences need to be better captured in legislation to ensure equal responses by law. Current frameworks, including the Online Safety Act 2023 and Criminal Justice and Courts Act 2015, do not adequately capture harms that intersect with protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010.

Recognising compounding harm would align with existing equality-focused principles and better reflect all women's lived experience. Similar approaches are seen internationally, including in Aotearoa (New Zealand)[15] and Quebec, Canada[16], where cultural context can be considered within legal responses.

The most effective route would be to adopt a proposed clause (d) into the Sexual Offences Act (2003), section 66B:

Sharing or threatening to share intimate photograph or film

(1) A person (A) commits an offence if—

(a) A intentionally shares a photograph or film which shows, or appears to show, another person (B) in an intimate state

(b) B does not consent to the sharing of the photograph or film, and

(c) A does not reasonably believe that B consents.

(d) A intentionally shares a photograph or film which may cause B discriminatory harm on the basis of protected characteristics.

The proposal adopts similar language to that used in the Equality Act 2010, with protected characteristics including, race, religion, and sexual orientation.

An offence of non-consensual possession should be included as part of section 66B to address concerns about material being shared in the future. There also needs to be consideration about effective legal reform to address those who go on to further non-consensually share material, outside of the initial perpetrator.

Legislative change alone cannot bring about the whole tide of changes needed to ensure equal legislative protection, however it is a strong signal of intention in the protection afforded to all women.

[15] See Harmful Digital Communications Act 2015, s 6, principle 10.

[16] Yuan Stevens, 'Dignity, Intersectional Gendered Harm, and a Flexible Approach: Analysis of the Right to One's Image in Quebec' (2022) 19(2) Canadian Journal of Law and Technology 307.

Police and Criminal Justice Responses

Recording and evidence:

Police should introduce mandatory contextual data fields at the point of reporting. These should capture:

- Whether the abuse forms part of a pattern or ongoing course of conduct
- Whether the online nature of the abuse creates potential for extended or ongoing harm
- Whether compounding harms are present, including those intersecting with protected characteristics

The College of Policing and the Home Office should jointly review the National Crime Recording Standard and Home Office Counting Rules to incorporate these contextual harm fields. This would help ensure cases submitted to the Crown Prosecution Service reflect structured patterns of harm rather than isolated incidents with limited contextual evidence. In parallel, the Crown Prosecution Service should review its charging guidance so prosecutors are directed to seek, assess and consider contextual evidence when making charging decisions.

First contact:

Police responses should ensure victims are able to explain the full context of the harm they have experienced, rather than being required to reduce their experiences to a single incident. Officers receiving reports of technology-facilitated abuse should be trained to recognise that online abuse may carry significant risks of offline harm that are not immediately visible in the digital content itself.

Officers should also understand that, for Racially Minoritised Women, non-sexual images can be particularly harmful. They can be weaponised through shame, racialised abuse and community dynamics, even where current legal definitions do not recognise this.

Where victims receive informed, validating and culturally competent responses at first contact, they are more likely to remain engaged with the criminal justice process, reducing withdrawal rates and improving the likelihood of cases progressing through the justice system.

Police and Criminal Justice Responses...

Cultural competence:

The continued lack of cultural awareness among responding and decision-making officers has direct consequences for women's safety. All police training should embed cultural competence as standard. This should include:

- Recognition of weaponised shame
- Recognition of the relationship between tech abuse and broader forms of violence against women and girls including so-called honour-based abuse
- Understanding of how racialised fetishisation and intersecting forms of discrimination operate within image-based abuse
- Confidence to identify escalating risks and make appropriate safeguarding referrals where offline harm is identified, even where no criminal offence can yet be established

These competencies should be embedded within national policing standards and assessed by HMICFRS as part of force-level violence against women and girls inspections, rather than being left to individual force discretion.

Platform Accountability

Ofcom as the regulator should prioritise tackling repeat offenders and harmful networks, including:

- Impersonation account clusters
- Collector ecosystems hosting non-consensual material
- Cross-platform harassment patterns

Ofcom should use its full powers under the Online Safety Act 2023 to require platforms to identify and act on these patterns. This way harm is addressed at the source, reducing repeated victimisation rather than responding to incidents.

Platforms should be asked to include a comment box into reporting processes to provide an opportunity for individuals to provide the context of harm they have experienced or witnessed.

Platforms should be required to address how their systems organise, promote, and monetise harmful content, rather than focusing only on individual posts. Under the Online Safety Act 2023, Ofcom should require:

- Disruption of harmful content clustering and recommendation, particularly where content is grouped or promoted based on racialised or sexualised characteristics
- Review of engagement-driven metrics that amplify abusive and harmful content
- Assessment and mitigation of algorithmic bias, including where non-sexual content becomes sexualised through recommendation systems
- Targeted action on harmful ecosystems, including impersonation networks and 'collector' sites hosting racially categorised non-consensual material
- A shift from size-based to harm-based regulation, ensuring smaller high-risk platforms are tackled in the same way as the larger platforms

This way, platforms would be required to audit and adjust recommender systems and content categorisation, while Ofcom prioritises enforcement against systems and sites that repeatedly produce and amplify harm.



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